



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



NEW COMMUNITY PROVIDER ADDED AS A RESOURCE FOR URGENT CARE BENEFIT

Through the MISSION Act of 2018, the VA offered an urgent care benefit that provides eligible veterans with greater choice and access to timely, high-quality care. The Urgent Care benefit met the need for a quick trip to a conveniently located community walk-in clinic or urgent care facility as an alternative for minor injuries and illnesses.

VA Black Hills Health Care System is happy to announce Fall River Health Services has been added as a contracted community provider. As of May 21, 2020, eligible veterans may choose to use the urgent care benefit at Fall River Health Services located at 1201 Highway 71 in Hot Springs.

This is an important change because veterans must receive urgent care from a provider that is part of the VA's contracted network of community providers. The VA can pay for an urgent care claim, without VA preauthorization, only if the veteran is eligible for the benefit; the urgent care provider is part of the VA's contracted network of community providers; and the services are not excluded under the benefit (excluded services include preventive services and dental services). The benefit allows three free visits per year with a co-pay for visits beyond three.

Veterans can learn more about the Urgent Care benefit on https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/Urgent_Care.asp.

To find a location of a contracted provider for urgent care use the link <https://www.va.gov/find-locations/> and select urgent care and community.

To check eligibility, call 844-MyVA311 (844-698-2311), select option 1, and then select option 1 again OR contact your local VA medical facility.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Mt Rushmore Tickets.....	2
Wyoming National Cemetery.....	3
SD State Fair	4
Burn Pit Legislation	5
POW Headstones.....	6
VA Cancer Care	7
Upcoming Events.....	8



GOV. NOEM ANNOUNCES DETAILS FOR MOUNT RUSHMORE CELEBRATION

Today, Governor Kristi Noem announced specific plans for the July 3rd fireworks event in celebration of Independence Day at Mount Rushmore. President Trump has announced his plans to attend the event as well.

"Following months of planning, I'm pleased to announce our specific plans for Mount Rushmore Fireworks on July 3," said Governor Noem. "There's truly no better place to celebrate America's birthday. We're excited that President Trump is coming to enjoy the show with us. He and the Department of the Interior have been great partners in bringing this celebration back to our great state and the entire nation."

South Dakota has worked tirelessly with the Department of the Interior, including the National Parks Service, to ensure that this celebration is as safe and successful as possible.

"President Trump recognizes the celebration of our nation's founding to be about our history, our people, and the heroes who proudly defend our flag — the brave men and women of the United States Military," said Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt. "Bringing an incredible firework display back to Mount Rushmore is for the American people and those who have made the United States the greatest country in the world, and I thank Governor Noem and the State of South Dakota for being wonderful partners in helping us make this possible."

The South Dakota Department of Tourism has spearheaded planning for this event in collaboration between several agencies, including local, county, state, and federal officials.

"Now more than ever, South Dakota and our nation need something to look forward to, and we can't think of a better event than celebrating our nation's independence at Mount Rushmore National Memorial. We are very honored to be working with our partners at the Department of the Interior and the National Parks Service," said Jim Hagen, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Tourism. "Millions of people from around the globe will witness this incredible spectacular happening right in the heart of the beautiful Black Hills of The Mount Rushmore State."

Details about the Mount Rushmore fireworks celebration, including how to attend, and answers to other FAQs can be found at www.TravelSouthDakota.com/RushmoreFireworks. National Parks Service also conducted an environment assessment in preparation for the event, and that assessment can be found [here](#).

RECREATION.gov

Alert: The South Dakota's Mount Rushmore Fireworks Celebration lottery will begin accepting applications on 6/5/2020 at 8:00 AM Mountain Time.



South Dakota's Mount Rushmore Fireworks
Celebration Lottery

VA NAMES NEW NATIONAL CEMETERY IN RURAL WYOMING

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced Cheyenne National Cemetery for the name of the new VA national cemetery in Cheyenne, WY.

“The VA recognizes the need for having a national cemetery in rural areas,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This cemetery in Wyoming, like the others the VA is opening similarly across the country, will help us reach veterans who have not previously had reasonable access to a national or state veterans cemetery.”

There are currently 56,948 veterans within a 75-mile radius of Cheyenne. The closest burial option Ft. Logan National Cemetery, is located 114 miles away in Denver, Colorado. The only in-state veterans cemetery is Oregon Trails Veterans Cemetery, run by the State of Wyoming, located 176 miles away in Evansville.

The VA relies on local veterans and community leaders to submit name suggestions for new VA cemeteries. Of the names

submitted, “Cheyenne National Cemetery” which was nominated by several veterans groups, best met the VA’s naming criteria and is consistent with the [requirements relating to naming department property](#), including national cemeteries, to be named for the geographic area in which the facility is located.

The VA purchased 5.04 acres of land, located on Hildreth Road near the Department of Agriculture Research Station, in January 2017. Cheyenne National Cemetery is scheduled to conduct its first interments close to year’s end. The first phase of cemetery development will have a capacity of 1,604 gravesites.



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE FAIR CONTINUES PLANNING FOR 2020 EVENT

The South Dakota Department of Agriculture (SDDA) announced the South Dakota State Fair, scheduled for September 3-7, 2020, will continue.

This year the South Dakota State Fair celebrates its 135th fair, themed 'Perfect Vision of Fun' and will showcase youth, tradition, agriculture, and South Dakota heritage. Planning for the Fair will look different as we navigate challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even through the most difficult times, the state fair has been known to be an event where youth can celebrate achievement and showcase their hard work throughout the summer. The state fair may look different than it has in previous years, but the SDDA is dedicated to creating a welcoming event where people can enjoy time with family and friends.



As COVID-19 continues to offer its challenges, the SDDA and the South Dakota State Fair will work diligently to implement the necessary changes to promote hygiene and health while in attendance. Components of the fair may be scaled to ensure Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines are being implemented. Currently, options are being researched and explored to increase additional health measures throughout the state fairgrounds.

"The State Fair is a celebration that many look forward to every year, and South Dakota continues to set the example of getting 'Back to Normal' and continuing opportunities for youth in our state," says South Dakota Lieutenant Governor and Interim Secretary of Agriculture Larry Rhoden. "The Fair is an event that lifts our spirits, no matter how difficult the times or circumstances. This year's Fair will look different, but let's embrace that challenge, adapt as necessary, and put on the best State Fair possible."

The South Dakota State Fair appreciates all the support they have received while navigating this decision. The 'Perfect Vision of Fun' will take on a new meaning as the fair approaches. Moving forward and planning an event that continues to be fun and exciting while implementing CDC guidelines will remain a top priority for the South Dakota State Fair.

Agriculture is a major contributor to South Dakota's economy, generating \$32.5 billion in annual economic activity and employing over 132,000 South Dakotans. The South Dakota Department of Agriculture's mission is to promote, protect, and preserve South Dakota agriculture for today and tomorrow. Visit us online at sdda.sd.gov or find us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

LEGISLATION INTRODUCED TO HELP SERVICEMEMBERS AND VETERANS EXPOSED TO BURNPITS

U.S. Sens. Mike Rounds and Amy Klobuchar (MN) introduced legislation to make sure that servicemembers and veterans with previous exposure to burn pits receive the care they need during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The *Pandemic Care for Burn Pits Exposure Act* would require the Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to ask servicemembers and veterans who have tested positive for a virus designated by the federal government as a pandemic, including COVID-19, if they were previously exposed to burn pits, so they can properly address their medical needs and make certain they receive proper care.

“Servicemembers and veterans who have been exposed to open burn pits during the course of their duty to our nation are more vulnerable to respiratory illnesses,” said Rounds. “These illnesses, such as asthma, may put individuals at a higher risk of experiencing dangerous symptoms if they contract a virus like COVID-19. Our legislation will require the VA and DOD to assure that this risk is identified and integrated into patient care plans. It will also enable research on how COVID-19 affects individuals exposed to burn pits so that the government can develop better protection and treatment strategies for those who have answered the nation’s call.”

Servicemembers and veterans exposed to toxic airborne chemicals or stationed near an open burn pit will also be enrolled in the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, unless they choose to opt out.

The bill also directs the Airborne Hazards and Burn Pits Center of Excellence to conduct a study of the health impacts on servicemembers and veterans who test positive for a virus that is designated as a global pandemic – including those who test positive for COVID-19 – and were exposed to burn pits and toxic substances.

The legislation is endorsed by the Toxic Exposures in the American Military (TEAM) coalition, which is comprised of [30 organizations](#), including Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Association (IAVA) and Wounded Warrior Project.

In April, Rounds and Klobuchar wrote a [letter](#) to the VA to take additional measures to make certain that our at-risk veterans – including those exposed to burns pits and other toxic substances – receive the care they need during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

VA TO BEGIN LEGAL PROCESS OF REPLACING THREE GERMAN POW HEADSTONES

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that it will initiate the process required by law to replace three German prisoner of war headstones in national cemeteries in Texas and Utah. The headstones are controversial because they bear swastikas and other symbols and texts related to the Nazi regime that millions of Americans fought during World War II.

The headstones mark the graves of prisoners of war and are located at sites and in cemeteries protected by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Consequently, under NHPA, the VA is not permitted to unilaterally remove them or alter them. However, later this month, under Section 106 of NHPA, the VA will begin taking required steps including consultation with stakeholders about how to replace these headstones with historically accurate markers that do not include the Nazi swastika and German text.

"Americans must always remember the horror of the Nazi regime and why so many Americans sacrificed so much to free the world from its reign of terror," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "It is understandably upsetting to our veterans and their families to see Nazi inscriptions near those who gave their lives for this nation. That's why the VA will initiate the process required to replace these POW headstones."

The German POW headstones are located in the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio, Texas, and the Fort Douglas Post Cemetery in Salt Lake City, Utah. The cemeteries were under the control of the Army when these interments occurred in the 1940s. The Ft. Sam Houston and Ft. Douglas cemeteries

Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery



Fort Douglas Post Cemetery



were subsequently transferred to VA's National Cemetery Administration in 1973 and 2019, respectively. Once replaced, the VA will propose to preserve the headstones in its National Cemetery Administration History Collection.

The VA will also install interpretive signs at all VA national cemeteries where foreign enemy prisoners of war are interred in order to provide historical context about how non-U.S. service members from World War I and World War II were interred and buried on American soil.

VA/BRISTOL MYERS SQUIBB FOUNDATION TO DELIVER CANCER CARE TO VETERANS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it is teaming with the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation (Foundation) to build new programs to enable VA oncology specialists to provide veterans access to [precision cancer care](#) regardless of where they live.

The Foundation has committed to providing VA \$4.5 million in grant funds over three years to help establish a national teleoncology center to more effectively reach Veterans living in rural communities.

The VA Center for Strategic Partnerships facilitated the grant, which will utilize VA's telehealth infrastructure allowing Veterans access to teleoncology platforms under the Foundation's Global Cancer Disparities Initiative. This will offer genetic counseling to veterans who undergo sequencing and afford veteran oncology patients a range of potentially life-saving clinical trials — even if they live a distance away from a VA medical center. Veterans enrolled in VA health care are two and a half times more likely to live in rural areas where access to specialty care is limited.

The program will support the delivery of best-in-class care, education and practice in collaboration with VHA's existing precision oncology initiative which has had dramatic impacts for some veterans and will now be available to all veterans with advanced cancer.

The Foundation's grant will also be used to create a human centered design training program. Leaders from Bristol Myers Squibb, Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation and VHA will launch the program at the America Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) annual meeting. During the ASCO20 virtual education program, August 8-10, they will share individual capabilities and discuss how collaboration is improving cancer care for the nation's military veteran patient population.

The teleoncology program paves the way for VA and the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation to enhance the capabilities of [VA Video Connect](#), a platform that allows veterans and their caregivers to meet virtually with their VA health care teams on any computer, tablet or mobile device with an internet connection. VA Video

Connect is one of the largest and most successful digital health platforms in the nation and is currently responsible for conducting more than 20,000 virtual appointments each day.

Veterans interested in participating in VA's teleoncology services should consult with their VA health care team. For more information about VA telehealth, visit [connected care](#).



Bristol-Myers Squibb
Foundation

UPCOMING EVENTS

Jun 14—Flag Day

Jun 21—Fathers Day

Jul 6—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)

Jul 10—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Bldg. 145—Room 108—Fort Meade VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre

Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair

Sep 3-7—SD State Fair

Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)

Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

Dec 1—Governor's State of the Budget Address—1:00 pm (CT)

Jan 12—Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm (CT)

Jan 13—SDDVA/SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception

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